

Message Text

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CONFIDENTIAL BOGOTA 8825

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TAGS PFOR CO

SUBJ: LOPEZ REACTS TO NY TIMES EDITORIAL BY ATTACKING US ON

NARCOTICS

1. SUMMARY. PRES LOPEZ HAS REACTED ANGRILY TO SEP 12 NY TIMES EDITORIAL ON COLOMBIA BY CHARGING, IN TURN, THAT US WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DRUG TRAFFIC IN COLOMBIA BECAUSE IT COULD NOT CONTROL ITS CRIMINALS. THE FORNMIN HAD CALLED ME TO WARN ME THE PRESS WAS UPSET AND WAS GOING TO MAKE A STATEMENT. AFTER I SAW THE COMMUNIQUE, I CALLED LIEVANO LAST NIGHT AND EXPRESSED MY SURPRISE AND CONCERN AT THE NATURE OF THE STATEMENT. EMBARRASSED, LIEVANO ASKED THAT I EXPLAIN TO WASHINGTON THIS WAS A REACTION TO THE NYT PIECE. THE COMMUNIQUE ITSELF MAKES NO REF TO THE EDITORIAL AND THE CONNECTION IS NOT APPARENT. IT WAS FRONTPAGED IN TODAY'S LOCAL PRESS WITHOUT COMMENT SO FAR. END SUMMARY.

2. FORNMIN LIEVANO CALLED ME LATE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON TO SAY THAT PRES LOPEZ WAS EXTREMELY UPSET AND MAD ABOUT THE NY TIMES EDITORIAL "TERROR IN COLOMBIA." THE MIN SAID THAT LOPEZ CONSIDERED IT AN INSULT TO HIM AND TO COLOMBIAN SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY ON THE EVE OF THE VISIT. THE PRES, THE MIN SAID, WAS IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING A STATEMENT AND HE WANTED ME TO KNOW ABOUT THIS AND TO UNDERSTAND HOW DEEPLY AGGRIEVED THEPRES FELT.

3. THE COMMUNIQUE WAS ISSUED LATE IN THE AFTERNOON. IT STARTS
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OUT BY REFERRING TO THE RECENT POLIT STORM AND STATES THAT THE

PRES WOULD MAKE NO CHANGES IN HIS GOVT IN VIEW OF THE ADHESION TO HIS ADMIN BY THE CONSERVATIVE CABINET MEMBERS AND GOVERNORS, "ESPECIALLY SINCE SOME INTERNATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES HAVE DISTORTED THE MEANING OF THESE RESIGNATIONS PRESENTING THEM AS A SIGN OF DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE GOVT, WHEN, ON THE CONTRARY, NO ONE HAS SUPPORTED THE CHARGES MADE BY MRS OSPINA." (THE QUOTE IS THE ONLY REF IN THE WHOLE COMMUNIQUE TO THE FORN PRESS.) THE COMMUNIQUE THEN LAUNCHES INTO A SHARP, INTEMPERATE CHARGE THAT THE US WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DRUG TRAFFIC IN COLOMBIA BECAUSE IT CANNOT CONTROL ITS CRIMINALS. THERE IS NO EXPLICIT RELATING OF THIS CHARGE TO THE NY TIMES EDITORIAL. A FULL TRANSLATION OF THE RELEVANT PORTION IS GIVEN IN SEPTEL.

4. UPON READING THIS I CALLED THE FORNMIN LAST NIGHT AND EXPRESSED MY SURPRISE AND CONCERN. IN OUR LONG CONVERSATION, LIEVANO REPEATED THAT THE PRES WAS UPSET, SAID THAT THE NY TIMES STARTED IT AND ATTACKED COLOMBIA IN AN UNJUSTIFIED WAY. I REPLIED THAT BE THAT AS IT MAY, TO TRADE INSULT FOR INSULT WAS NOT CONSTRUCTIVE, THAT THE COMMUNIQUE MAKES NO CONNECTION WITH THE EDITORIAL AND THEREFORE PEOPLE WILL NOT UNDERSTAND IT. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER, I SAID, TO HAVE COMPLAINED OPENLY ABOUT THE EDITORIAL; BUT TO EXPRESS ANGER INDIRECTLY BY MAKING A CHARGE AGAINST US WOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD AND WOULD REALLY SOUR THE ENVIRONMENT. THE NY TIMES AFTER ALL WAS A PRIVATE NEWSPAPER; LOPEZ WAS A CHIEF OF STATE.

5. THE MIN DEFENDED THE COMMUNIQUE AS BEST HE COULD, MOSTLY BY ATTACKING THE NY TIMES. BUT HE WAS CLEARLY EMBARRASSED AND UPSET HIMSELF. HE ASKED ME TO EXPLAIN TO WASHINGTON WHAT HAPPENED. I SAID I WOULD.

6. FOR SOME TIME LOPEZ HAS BEEN UPSET OVER US PRESS STORIES, ESPECIALLY THE MARVINE HOWE PIECES IN NY TIMES, MANY OF WHICH HAVE BEEN INACCURATE AND DISTORTED. KEYED UP AS WELL OVER THE "CABINET CRISIS" OF RECENT DAYS, THE EDITORIAL WAS THE STRAW THAT BROKE HIS BACK AND GAVE RISE TO THIS UNFORTUNATE SHOW OF ANGER. I THINK IT IMPORTANT FOR THE SAKE OF LARGER US-COLOMBIAN RELATIONS THAT WE UNDERSTAND ALL THIS, THE PROVOCATION AND LOPEZ' PARTICULAR PERSONALITY TWIST, AND NOT REACT IN ANGER OURSELVES. VAKY

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